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ABSTRACT

This technical assistance paper focuses on enhancing teachers' ability to match their expectations with children's existing or emerging capabilities and to facilitate children's development of inner control. Encouraging teachers to adopt a humanistic approach, which promotes opportunities for children to learn and become self-directed, is suggested. Developing self-control and self-esteem are two facets of self-direction that are discussed in detail. Investigating the different elements in the preschool program, such as the physical classroom arrangement, classroom practices, and the teacher's behavior, is considered an important part of the guidance function. Acknowledging the fact that there are no foolproof formulas for guiding child behavior, several ideas for nurturing and maintaining a healthy emotional climate in the classroom are recommended, especially avoiding punitive behavior management techniques. Some specific suggestions are made for guiding children with special needs. Several of the issues discussed in the paper are presented in figures detailing: (1) techniques that a teacher can adopt to enhance a child's self-esteem; (2) possible challenges in the classroom and their solutions; (3) teacher behaviors that should be either encouraged or discouraged; (4) ways of developing positive teacher talk; and (5) ways of handling specific incidents that may happen in the classroom. Contains 6 additional resources and 12 references. (BAC)

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KENTUCKY PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

Guiding Children's Behavior

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Introduction

No subject is likely to be of more concern to an early childhood teacher than that of guidance. In the previous technical assistance papers in this series, educators were guided to examine their philosophy and goals, establish routines, design developmentally appropriate curricula and make changes in the physical environment. Once these basic structural elements are in place, educators must learn to focus on positively guiding children's behavior. This may involve looking critically at present techniques and re-learning strategies.

In a developmentally appropriate classroom, serious planning will help to effectively meet the goals of guidance. Teachers must be willing to examine the physical environment, programming practices and their own behavior. Ongoing observation will enable teachers to individualize the guidance for each child. By employing a variety of positive guidance strategies, teachers will strengthen their ability to match their expectations with children's existing or emerging capabilities and to facilitate the development of inner control.

Warm interpersonal relationsips foster happy experiences for staff and children.

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Humanistic Approach

Developing Self-Control

Teachers must have the expectation that gradually the children in the classroom will become self-directed. When adults understand child development they will more likely promote opportunities for children to learn and become self-directed, and ease into the background while children practice their self-direction (Hildebrand, 1990a, p. 10).

When teachers guide children, they are *educating* them about the difference between behavior that is appropriate and behavior that is not—a lesson that can serve them throughout life. They are *guiding* children to develop self-control. While this development of self-control is in process, the teacher must be willing to assume control if necessary, keeping in mind that one important goal is to help children achieve responsibility for themselves. There are many practical ways to foster this responsibility within young children.

Decision making. Give children opportunities to make decisions and problem-solve. For example, ask the child if they would prefer blue or red construction paper as they begin an art experience.

Consequences. See that children experience consequences of their decisions and develop an understanding of those consequences, good or bad.

Competencies. Provide opportunities for children to be successful, which comes in part from the acquisition of competencies. The inner conviction of basic competence is, in the long run, the most satisfactory builder of self-esteem (Hendrick, 1984, p. 131).

Because the individual needs of children are varied and handicapping conditions wide ranging, teachers must be willing to gather information relevant to the specific behavioral needs of the classroom. Basically, all children need to love and be loved. They need to be valued as individuals and encouraged to develop independence. Thus, an overall humanistic developmental approach to discipline will usually work.

Developing Self-Esteem

Generally, self-concept is defined as the perceptions, feelings, and attitudes that a person has about himself or herself whereas self-esteem (or self-worth) refers specifically to a person's self-evaluations—that is, their judgments about their worth (Marshall, 1989). Curry and Johnson (1990, p.8) have noted that to ensure that children develop the skills and character needed to function constructively it is important to:

- Promote responsive, caring, cooperative, empathetic human relationships,
- provide opportunities and support for individual self-development, and
- respect, celebrate, and learn from cultural, ethnic, and individual diversity.

Low opinion of oneself is consistently and intimately linked to a wide variety of emotional and behavioral disturbances and low self-esteem is also found in children, teens and adults who regularly do poorly in family life, social relationships and school and job performance (Greenberg, 1988). Educators of young children need to continuously evaluate their methods and strategies employed in guiding children's behavior in order to prevent damaging the child's long term self-esteem.

Unfortunately teachers cannot simply give children high esteem. Teachers, can, however give children positive opportunities to succeed and honest and genuine encouragement. Figure 1 gives examples of specific ways to enhance a child's self-esteem by variations of teachers' words and phrases, proximity, body language, and appropriate experiences. Learn to identify, study and practice a variety of esteem-building strategies.

Investigation

An important part of the guidance function is investigation. As facilitators, teachers are constantly called upon to be managers—managers of the environment, classroom practices, and their own behavior (Mitchell, 1982). In addition to knowing everything they can about each of their children (their needs, interests, strengths, backgrounds, home stressors), teachers must also know as much about the total program. Investigating the different elements in the program may provide clearer solutions to the daily challenge of guiding children's behavior.

Environment

Look at the classroom arrangement. Is it restful, fun for kids and inviting? Are stressful situations minimized by planning the traffic flow? Are the learning areas arranged for maximum utility and interest? Figure 2 illustrates possible challenges in the classroom environment and possible solutions.

Programming Practices

Next, consider classroom practices, the philosophy and goals. Are the beliefs about how young children learn congruent with the methods employed and the curriculum implemented? Remember one of the main goals for guiding children's behavior is to provide opportunities to develop a strong self-concept. For example, many teachers pressure children to prepare for academics by providing paper and pencil worksheet activities. In reality, children learn best through first-hand experience (e.g., coloring five straws is not as meaningful to a child as holding and counting five real straws). See Figure 3 for additional possibilities of enhancing self-esteem through developmentally appropriate practices.

Teacher Behavior

Finally, re-examine and investigate the role as teacher in guiding children's behavior. Just as the environment provides the physical structure for the program and the classroom practices, schedules, routines, and plans provide the temporal structure, the TEACHER PROVIDES THE EMOTIONAL STRUCTURE for the program. Guiding behavior is a creative process that requires spontaneity, constant thinking and decision making on the part of the teacher. Figure 4 has a few examples that illustrate how teachers can promote learning and growth—or interfere with the process. Also, Box 1 gives examples of developing positive teacher talk. For some educators this positive communication flows smoothly and for others, it takes practice, practice, practice!

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Figure 1

ENCOURAGEMENT

WORDS AND PHRASES - Preschoolers are entitled to more than "good" and "very good".

Super!	Amazing!	Good thinking!	How creative!	Sensational!

PROXIMITY - Frequently our nearness can be a technique used to calm, redirect, or reinforce the child's behavior.

Hugging	Stroking	Handholding	Back stroking	Lap sitting	A gentle touch

BODY LANGUAGE - Children can sense when our body language is different than our verbal language.

Winking	Smiling	Clapping	Laughing	Widening eyes in interest

ACTIVITIES - A variety of experiences can be soothing, tension-releasing and acceptable outlets for energy.

Water Play	Art	Outdoors	Music	Dramatic	Puppetry
Washing toys, dolls, trucks; playing with bubbles	Playdough fingerpaints, shaving cream	Sliding, Jumping, Swinging, Running	Resounding Drums! Childrens' music in general	Playing dress-up, act out situations	Puppets are better listeners than adult (sometimes)

*Adapted from Becker, W. (1971). Parents are teachers: A child management program. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

Children's temperaments can vary greatly and must be responded to individually.

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Figure 2

INVESTIGATE ENVIRONMENT

Behavioral Problems. . .Solutions May be in the Physical Environment

THE CHALLENGE...	TRY THIS...
*Children run randomly in the classroom.	Use low shelves, peg board dividers, concrete block and plank board shelving,or furniture to define the space and create boundaries.
*Children seem destructive to the materials and lack respect for the classroom property. Clean-up is bedlam!	Perhaps there is a general lack of order for materials. Make a place for everything. Color-code, label, outline, and use photographs to help children develop a sense of where materials belong. Positively reinforce appropriate clean up.
*Children constantly want materials that other children are using.	Occasionally, we overburden children to "share". Providing duplicates can be helpful. Some activities lend themselves to a waiting list. Perhaps the concept for development is as follows: "Miko, when the pegboard is back in its space on the shelf, you can have a turn." The same follows true for an empty chair/open chair concept which tells children they can participate when a chair is available.
*Children are easily distracted and have difficulty staying with a project.	Get down on your knees at child's eye level and survey your classroom. Are the pictures and art work hanging at adult or child eye-level? Are there visual "breaks" or continual wall clutter and overstimulating colors?
*Children constantly "forget" the rules.	Simplify rules. Post illustrated rules as reminders near areas where limits are necessary. Some quality programs have one basic rule: "Take care of yourself, other people, and property"

Figure 3

INVESTIGATE PROGRAM AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Consider the following possibilities:

DON'T EMPHASIZE:	DO EMPHASIZE:
GROUPING CHILDREN ACCORDING TO ABILITY (Homogenous grouping)	MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF ABILITY (Heterogeneous grouping)
ASSIGNING SIMILAR TASKS	CHOICES OF DIFFERENT MATERIALS, DIFFERENT TASKS, SAME TIME
PUBLICLY EVALUATING PERFORMANCE	EVALUATING CHILDREN, INDIVIDUALLY, PRIVATELY
CONTROLLING CHILDREN THROUGH EXTERNAL MEANS	SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S AUTONOMY
OVERSTIMULATING OR BORING CHILDREN	PROVIDING BALANCE OF ACTIVE AND QUIET EXPERIENCES
FORCING CHILDREN TO SPEND UNNECESSARY TIME WAITING, TAKING TURNS	PROMOTING INDEPENDENCE, INVOLVEMENT, AND SELF-ABSORPTION
HURRYING CHILDREN	CALM, RELAXED, LOW PRESSURE ATMOSPHERE

Figure 4

INVESTIGATE TEACHER BEHAVIOR

Avoid:	Try To:
Overpraising which can diminish the value of the child's accomplishment...	Communicate valid approval with descriptive encouragement ...
Focusing on children behaving to avoid punishment or bribery...	Notice appropriate behavior ("catch em being good")...
Saying "Stop it!" or "Don't"...save these commands for extreme emergencies...	Practice positive intervention by emphasizing what the child can do... diversion...redirection...
Offering choices when no choices exist...	Offer choices that are acceptable... Provide experiences in decision-making...when you can abide by their decisions...
Forcing children's action by over-using rewards, by bribery...	Help children to discover the inner satisfaction of completing a project or learning for its own sake...
Blaming children—"You knew not to spill the paint!"...	Send "I" messages vs. "you" messages (Gordon, 1970)
Misplacing authority ("do it, because I said so")... friends	Explain the reason behind the rule... ("Let's clean up the spilled water so our won't slip and fall")

A teacher's enthusiasm is contagious!

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Box 1

TEACHER TALK

Have you tried. . .

. . . **stating the rules in a positive way?**
"Use an indoor voice in our classroom. Shouting is an outdoor voice. In a few minutes we'll be on the playground and you can use an outside voice."

. . . **using cause and effect statements?**
"If we don't wipe up the spilled paint, someone might slip and fall."

. . . **demonstrating appropriate behavior?**
"Watch how I keep the sand down low."

. . . **redirecting potential misbehavior?**
"Alison, here's a puzzle with boats. It might be fun to work this while you wait for the pegs."

. . . **promoting realistic choices?**
"Would you like to paint at the easel using foil or wallpaper today?"

. . . **directing children's communication?**
"Use your words to tell Latonya how you feel."

. . . **providing cool-off periods?**
"Let's sit over here until we feel better."

. . . **logical consequences?**
"If you continue to throw sand, the sandtable will be closed to you for the rest of the day." (Logical consequence = sand area closed to child if child chooses to misbehave)

. . . **natural consequences?**
"If you don't eat snack with us now, you may be hungry before lunchtime." (natural consequence = hunger)

Guidance Strategies: Trial And Error

Establish a policy for the classroom to not allow punitive behavior management techniques; no abusive verbal or physical discipline. Very often children with difficult behavior to manage have already experienced too much abuse or negative management. School should be a very positive and fun experience.

Be aware that abuse can occur physically, mentally, and sexually. There are many valuable resources available that can help teachers recognize indicators of abuse and neglect. Examine the classroom and all operating policies. No high-quality program would ever use physical or verbal (mental) punishment as a form of discipline. Any teacher, aide, or caregiver who cannot handle a group of children without resorting to punishment should immediately be removed from contact with children (Hildebrand, 1991b). Resorting to verbal shaming, teasing, ridiculing, or scolding can be a form of mental abuse meant to humiliate and should not be permitted. Check with your local district's procedures for documenting and reporting suspected abuse. **IF ABUSE OR NEGLECT IS SUSPECTED, CALL YOUR LOCAL SOCIAL SERVICES REPRESENTATIVE OR USE THE KENTUCKY HOTLINE 1-800-752-6200.**

There may be situations where some behavior becomes so difficult to guide that it could be helpful to have an outside observer record baseline data, i.e., what a child does over a period of time. It may also be useful to video tape various incidents to examine interactions more closely. Using effective guidance takes study, observation, and practice, and a constant reminder that we want to help children be happy children and to feel good about themselves.

There are no foolproof recipes or formulas for guiding children's behavior. However, some techniques will work with most children. The following ideas may be tried for nourishing and maintaining a healthy, emotional climate in the classroom.

Basic knowledge of children. Know everything you can about young children. Gather information about their interests, abilities, and limitations, family history and their prior experience to school. Be conscious that the work of a preschooler is to be bossy, expansive, exuberant, and rebellious in name-calling. And yes, they are still self-centered although cooperative play is beginning to unfold. Knowledge of young children's development will enable you to set clear, reasonable, and consistent limits with age-appropriate expectations for children.

Modeling. Model behavior you would like the children to acquire or maintain. Children are keen observers who often do as we do, not as we say. Set an example of cooperation and sharing and enjoyment. Speak calmly, quietly, and manage your own feelings appropriately. However, we all have times, due to our own stress, that we are not successful models. Accept responsibility for your behavior and apologize. Children can learn a lot from teachers who are willing to say "I'm sorry".

Prevention. Anticipate challenges that may occur. Preventive measures are critical for a smooth-running day. Many factors in the environment can contribute to escalating voices and aggressive behaviors. For example, limited equipment, lack of outdoor play, children being rushed or hurried through activities, can create hectic times.

Redirection. Redirect children from potential problems. Teachers should not prevent all problems and deprive children of opportunities to solve them. However, sometimes a simple distraction or redirection to a different area or with a different activity can prevent unnecessary challenges. Learning to anticipate behavior is not easy and requires much practice.

Reflection. Take a deep breath when a child misbehaves. Pause for a moment and quickly decide whether this is an issue that warrants intervention. For instance, children often find their own solutions if given time. Too often, adults jump in to take care of everything and may be subtly transmitting a god-like message: "I have the answers. You can't be trusted to take care of your problems." If safety is a factor, intervention is a must.

Problem-solving practice. Consider each incident as an opportunity to teach children what is appropriate. Encourage children to think of different ways problems could be resolved. Provide opportunities for children to practice problem-solving through role-playing and socio-dramatics (when there are no incidents to deal with). Circle time is a good time to discuss everyday situations. Storytime can also provide frameworks for problem-solving and for presenting real-life situations. For example, I Was So Mad by Norma Simon can encourage children to brainstorm possible ways to express anger.

Once children have an understanding of the rules and limitations they can become self-directed in their play with equipment and with their peers.

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Effective communication. Communicate at eye-level with children. Kneeling down to child's height and looking in the child's eyes is a display of respect and is especially critical when he or she is upset or displaying out-of-bounds behavior. Hold the child's hands or put your arm around his/her shoulder. Avoid shouting across the room.

Recognition and acceptance of feelings. Show children that you recognize and accept their feelings. Accept their anger, their hurt, their tears without blaming, ridiculing or arguing. This is an investigative time; let children express their thoughts and identify the problem. Children may lack the verbal skills to describe what they perceive as the problem. Be an encourager and a facilitator.

Limitations. State the limitation. Clearly remind the child of the rules. Simple, few, and positive rules are easier for children to abide by than negative instructions. State the rule such as the following: "The sand stays in the sandtable." You can further the child's understanding with simple, logical reasons. Children have to have practice in learning to follow rules.

Firmness. Give directions in a firm yet friendly voice. Rules shoud be simple and as few as possible. Consistently enforce the rules to minimize confusion. In general, three or four rules related to 1) not hurting other people, 2) oneself, and 3) destroying property, will be sufficient. The use of consequences can assist children in realizing how what they say and do can affect others. Effective consequences are restrictions in space, such as where the child can play, or restrictions in use, such as what he or she can use. Do not establish restrictions in activity such as being made to sit indoors while classmates go outdoors (Read, 1987).

Intervention. If despite your efforts, (especially if safety is a factor) the child continues misbehaving, you must stop the child. Calling "time out" may provide a cooling down period for the child. Removal should be used as an aid to regain composure, not as punishment. Encourage the child to regroup as soon as he or she feels calm. Put the responsibility of deciding when to return to the group or activity on the child. By using a timer or telling the child when they can return, you are not teaching the child self-control (Katz, 1991). Sometimes it may be necessary to restrain a child to prevent injury to others or themselves. For example, holding a child who is hitting another child or guiding a child to stay on the teacher's lap until they are in control is effective restraint. Do it as a protective measure, not as a punishment.

Practice. Aim your guidance at the inappropriate behavior. Help young children develop the understanding that all their feelings are acceptable. They may feel angry, sad, mad, but may not scream, hit, or push. Teachers need time to develop the skill of using positive guidance techniques and child need practice and time to mature emotionally.

Despite all efforts, plans and intentions, sometimes teachers will experience the feeling "I've tried everything!" Positive guidance takes patience and is a challenge for everyone. See Box 1 for sample situations and possible alternatives for guiding children's behavior. Confer with other staff members, administrators, and parents about solutions to the everyday challenges to gain valuable suggestions to improve skills and maximize the children's potential.

Self-direction is easy with appropriate, concrete materials conveniently located on low, open shelves.

Guiding Children With Special Needs

Since disabling conditions are so widely varied, it is critical that teachers seek specific advice and information from special consultants. Excellent information can be found in a 1978 series of eight publications titled Mainstreaming Preschoolers (see Resources).

All of the points previously suggested in this paper apply to working with children with special needs and can be adapted in a logical fashion to serve a child with a disability. As preventive measures, teachers need to be prepared to talk over the differences between themselves and the children with special needs, differences that children may note immediately (Hildebrand, 1991a). For example, make short, honest statements such as, "Yes, Rachael is blind. She learns a lot by using her hands and listening with her ears. Perhaps you can tell her where the sandtable is." There are a variety of visual aids, props, and puppets that can be used as effective tools for enhancing understanding and acceptance of children with special needs.

Specific Suggestions

- Intervene to facilitate integration by planning appropriate experiences.
- Assess the interpersonal climate.
- Use a normal volume and tone of voice.
- Bend down at child's height.
- Give directions that refer to the individual's experiences and needs.
- Allow time. Sometimes it takes longer to do simple tasks and activities when one can't rely on hearing or vision, for example.
- Don't assume a child is disabled—give the child the benefit of the doubt.
- Encourage a buddy system-peer tutoring or peer modeling.
- Seek consultation and assistance in planning.

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THINK IT OVER. . .WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

• Jessica angrily hurls a block across the blockbuilding area.

Your impulse is probably to shout, "Don't do that! Why on earth would you do such a thing?" Angry commands and philosophical questions will not make the problem go away. Usually a four-year-old can't explain why he or she did something. Try recognizing her feelings: "I see that you're feeling angry!" Focus on what the child can do: "The blocks are for building, not throwing. That is dangerous and could hurt someone. Let's see if you can use this block to build your tower" (redirection). Sometimes preschoolers will throw for a variety of reasons . . anger, impulsiveness, or they may want to move something!

• Matthew is having a tantrum.

Frequently the yelling and kicking may grow more intense if you try talking to the child. If the child is not hurting himself or others you may let the tantrum take its course with some intentional ignoring on your part. Calm talking to an out-of-bounds screaming child is fairly useless. If you can, you might try acknowledging his behavior: "I can tell you're having a rough time Matthew. Let's sit here together until you can use your words to tell me what's wrong." Calming reassurance can be critical to a child who has lost control. If Matthew is hurting himself or others, restrain the child: "Matthew, I don't want you to hurt yourself or your friends. I'll hold you to help you calm down."

• Claire bites Henry.

Reasons for biting can vary. For a very young child (for example, a 2 year old) biting can be a natural defense. Some children bite as a result of teething. None the less, biting can be a forerunner of some serious aggression building up. Try going to Henry first (the victim) and reassuring him (going to Claire first might reinforce this negative behavior and some children might prefer negative attention to no attention). Turn to Claire and state the limitation quickly and firmly: "I will not let you bite your friends. I like you and I wouldn't want anyone to hurt you either. You may use your teeth to bite food. Let's go get some ice and hold it on Henry's arm." (You are promoting empathetic behavior).

• Michael spits on LaTonya.

Spitting is another behavior that can indicate that an emotional volcano may erupt. Again, attention to the victim for a brief second may be appropriate: "LaTonya, I'm sorry that Michael spit on you!" (An apology from the teacher may be setting an example for modeling. Forcing a child to apologize when they aren't really sorry is a rather futile act). The firm limitation: "I can tell you're angry Michael, but I will not let you spit on people. It is dangerous and unhealthy. Let me show you where you can spit." (Lead child to bathroom). Follow-through is an important step in positive guidance and showing Michael where it is acceptable to spit is critical. Encourage Michael to spit in the acceptable place (overcorrection).

• Robert calls Meredith a "poop-poophead".

Preschoolers find bathroom talk so very interesting! Some psychologists suggest ignoring the behavior and it will become extinct. Sometimes that works. . .sometimes it doesn't. Try encouraging Meredith to forcefully say: "I don't like you to call me silly names!" Recognize that children this age are caught up in the power of language and play on words. Providing language outlets such as silly, humorous fingerplays, and songs can be tension-releasing. Perhaps coming up with your own silly word as a substitute or a chant for redirection: "Robert, _ Robert, Bo-Bobert, banana-nana-fo-fobert,me-my-mo-mobert, Robert"—let's go get ready for snack!" can refocus the behavior.

A Final Note

Guiding children's behavior can be a complex and lengthy task that involves indirect planning and management of the space, equipment, and activities, as well as the direct interacting with and influencing of children's behavior. Teachers must keep in mind that the main goal is to guide children toward self-control, a life-long process. Ultimately teachers want to guide children to be trustworthy, reliable, truthful and responsible. This can be accomplished in part by strengthening a child's sense of self-worth. Esteem-building practices must be a part of the ongoing, continual efforts set forth by teachers.

With continued study, observation, practice and evaluation, early childhood teachers can help guide young children toward their maximum potential.

Talking things over at the child's eye level is a part of direct guidance that helps children gain self-control.

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- Children with Learning Disabilities, Alice H. Hayden, et al.
- Children with Mental Retardation, Eleanor Whiteside Lynch, et al.
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Cooperation and other prosocial behaviors can be an outcome of many well-planned experiences.

Washing one's hands is an important independence milestone that fosters a sense of self-sufficiency and develops habits of personal hygiene. Building self-esteem is the critical foundation for guiding children's behavior.

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